

7: Thompson--372
116, 769, 771, 775, 779

J-4

(no date) 1937

Laotians

"Along with the first migrations from the North and West into Laos filtered the Vedic precepts and the laws of Manu. From 900 to 700 B. C. the more militant dogmas of Brahmanism began to appear, at the same time as the ancestral cult and innumerable auxiliary superstitions. About the thirteenth century Buddhism began to appear by different routes, but it is the Ceylonese variety, albeit profoundly modified, which has the largest number of Laotian followers. Chiefly because it rejects study and examination, this doctrine permits many superstitions to live side by side with it, embedded at varying depths in the popular consciousness. The kind of Buddhism practised by the Laotians and some Khas is almost entirely exempt from philosophic speculation. Bonzes recite prayers incomprehensible to themselves and to the people, but they must mark every social event. These ceremonies, a reverential attitude towards sacred places, a dash of animism, the ancestral cult, and a belief in Kharma, make up official Laotian religion. Some of this has been absorbed by the Yaos and Lus, Khas and Meos, each of whom has added their own assortment of superstitions. Laotian superstitions, too, are myriad. They attribute all evils to spirits--none other than their ancestors, who take delight in returning to earth expressly to torment their relatives. Hence the great power of sorcerers, who, incidentally, are rent by the greatest professional jealousy. All of this, with a smattering of Christian converts, form an ill-defined, uneasy pantheism, quite congenial to the Laotian soul."

"In April 1881 two priests from the Society of Foreign Missions went to Oubone, where they found not a single native Christian. On a tour which they later made throughout Laos they found only four Christians in the whole country, two Siamese and two Annamites. When they began to evangelize Laos the current anarchy bred by the Ho invasions, Siamese deportations, and the perennial economic uncertainty was conducive to an encouraging number of conversions. With the establishment of the French, political security was assured, and the number of converts began visibly to decline. The ease of the early conversions had been misleading. Through centuries of persecution and uncertainty the Laotians have acquired a marked flair for success. They know to a fine point what earthly authorities it is worth their while to please. Moreover, the Laotians share the usual Asiatic indifference to dogma. One religion is as good to them as another, provided it does not upset the [379] social structure. Catholic discipline is irksome too. The Laotians find the indissolubility and relative asceticism of a Christian marriage far less congenial than their traditional polyandry and polygamy. The missionaries have also vainly tried to induce them to clothe themselves more voluminously and to give up opium."

10: d'Orleans--311-312 .

T-3

(1891-92) 1894

Laos

116, 779, 793, 781

"It is not every man, indiscriminately, who is allowed to pay court to the young women, for one class is [312] excluded, viz., that of the bonzes and the aspirants ~~to~~ that order. The creed is Buddhism, very much the same as in Burmah and Siam. Apart from a few free-thinkers, who are regarded as brands plucked for the burning, the people are religious, that is to say they flock to the pagodas for certain festivals, bring presents, and provide liberally for the bonzes. "

"Some of the old priests of Luang Prabang are honored as demigods by the people of the kingdom. They step forth from their holy dwellings only with a ceremonial parasol held over them, by one of the surrounding group of youngster attendants in the same bright yellow; and the French commissaire himself was almost servile in the respectful politeness with which he treated the most holy of them all, whose attitude sometimes suggested that it was he who had the upper hand. These bonzes may not even kill a flea, though the provocation must often be almost too strong to be borne; but they may eat beef and the flesh of other animals killed by some one else. Even the cynical French residents say they are real celibates, that they would be expelled from the order if they were caught breaking this particular vow. It might be harder to keep were not all young men expected to be priests for a year or two, as those of European lands become soldiers, only the ones to whom the monastic life appeals retaining the yellow robe, which the great majority soon discard for marriage. Little less sacred than the priests are the dogs that all but overrun the capital, eating the food laid out for gods and bonzes, much as the sacred oxen of India take their toll from pious shopkeepers. Held in a kind of Buddhist reverence by the people and more or less [301] protected by the priests, these mongrels are not even subjected to muzzle or license, though the French would like to improve their rules of sanitation to the extent of exterminating the harmless but self-confident curs."

23: Franck--301
116, 657, 779, 177.77
636.77

T-2

(1924) 1926

Laotians
France

"But the French do not insist on imposing their religious beliefs on their wards and colonies. In Luang Prabang they go so far as to provide for the up-keep of the temples and monasteries in the annual governmental budget. In a way this is a means of supporting the educational system, for the priests act as schoolmasters to their novices. In great contrast to China, there is not a single Christian missionary in all the Kingdom of the Divine Buddha, not even a Catholic priest."

23: Franck--341-342
116, 342, 361, 515, 779

T-2

(1924) 1926

Laotians

"The uncrowded, simple, but commodious houses of these Laosian villages are always set well apart and high above the ground, back among palm-trees, banana-plants, and the like. They do not have to crowd together and save all the arable land for rice to feed too numerous mouths, for here a gentle Buddhism takes place of an ancestor-worship so [342] ardent that offspring must be had at any effort and cost. Most families have round or square granaries like huge covered baskets made of wide woven splints and covered by a big thatch roof, all raised off the ground out of reach of rats. The simple houses themselves were of similar materials, a ladder or half a dozen bamboo or pole rungs leading up to the big porch at one end, and close to the floor, a tiny window or two that can be pushed open to one side. Such a village is a thousand per cent more pleasant than a Chinese town, even when there is no public stopping-place except in the same room with slightly supercilious priests who sometimes break sound sleep with their devotions. There is an incredible amount of bathing and great quiet compared to densely packed Chinese existence. Such a village is like a country home in its atmosphere, while those of China resemble tenement-living on the worst of East Sides."

25: Brodrick--98-99
116, 779, 782, 792, 872

S-3

(1939) 1948

Laotians

"...the framework of Little Vehicle Buddhism looks much the same as in the land of the Khmers. There are the saffron-robos, but the bonzes are sturdier and less composed than in Cambodia. When the monks do their rounds with their begging-bowls, the holy men do not hesitate to look women in the face, to speak with them and even to touch their hands. The Laotian bonzes are not the less Laotian for being bonzes, and by no means all of them observe strictly the precepts of their Order. In fact, some of them are [99] a little loose of conduct. Again, the Buddhist hierarchy in the Laos is almost more sacerdotal than monastic, and, in the public estimation, the bonze is more or less of a priest, that is, a man performing efficacious and quasi-magical ceremonies. There are temple-schools, as in Cambodia, Siam and Burma. In these schools the male population learns to read and write in the complicated Laotian script that is rather derived from Siamese than from Cambodian. The same moral obligations are supposed to constrain the monks. The offerings at the pagoda services are just fragrant frangipani flowers, candles and incense. There is no such divergence from Little Vehicle practice as would make of Laotian Buddhism a new religion such as is the Lamaism of Tibet. But everything is a little distorted, vague, misty, if we will. The alien religion is subjected to a strong push from beneath and is transmuted by an all-pervading atmosphere of nonchalance and good humour."

25: Brodrick--104 [2]

S-3

(1939) 1948

Laotians

116, 779, 177.79

France

~~636.79~~

"In the kingdom of Luang-Prabang there is no doubt that Little Vehicle is the state religion. We have seen how royally and respectfully. H. M. King Sisavang Vong received the Venerable Narada and his slip of the sacred Bodhi Tree. [HD: see category 116, p. 62-63] And the efforts of the French administration to purge the practice and reform the discipline of the monks was mildly successful in the Laos though not so obvious as in Cambodia. Still, the Laotians are difficult to coerce."

from pantheism to Christianity, passing through polytheism, anthropomorphism, Brahminism, Buddhism and metempsychosis. 771

To be sure, the most widespread religion and the one which numbers the greatest number of faithful is Ceylon Buddhism in the form of the Hinayāna doctrine, that is to say the form which adheres to the letter of the scriptures without pretending to seek or discover the esoteric meaning of the words of the master Çakya Mouni. 795 779

It is precisely because this doctrine abjures all casuistry, all scholasticism and all free examination that it has allowed the superstitions of Brahminism and still others to coexist alongside it. These latter are still more or less deeply entrenched, depending on the region and on whether the moral influence of the Aryans has been more or less effective and beneficent in uplifting the populace.

Since, in general, the Buddhism of the Laotians and of the Kha tribes which practice it is, by virtue of its very doctrine, exempt from all free [148] examination and from all philosophical speculation, it is a latria cult manifesting itself in ritual recitations. These latter, moreover, are incomprehensible to the faithful and even to the bonzes. To these prayers are added ceremonies and outer marks of deference for sacred places, temples, idols, worship accessories and officiants. [Illustration alongside text here.] 779

Besides this mild form of Buddhism there are still traces--often very deep ones--of Brahminism and ancestor worship, of a kind of polytheism or cult of spirits which are either beneficent genii or terrible demons, of Pythagorism, of metempsychosis, and of a curious anthropo-spiritualist belief which attributes an individual soul to each of the parts of man's body, to his moral faculties, to his food and even to his excrement, as well as to the four elements--earth, air, water and fire.

This latter belief borders closely on metempsychosis, since it also holds that all souls are immortal and subsist throughout a series of successive existences in the form of various incarnations, in the bodies of men or animals, in plants or in minerals.

It cannot be denied that this doctrine is a highly moral one. Since each mutation or incarnation is a reward or a [149] punishment, there can be no doubt but that, in combination with the precepts of sociability, respect for others and gentleness which are contained in Hinayāna Buddhism, it has had great influence on the moral evolution and social conservation of the people of Laos as well as on their moral customs.

779 Buddhism is practiced by the Laotians, the Lus, the Youns and
771 a few Thai tribes as well as by the Khouène and Khmou Khas.

The white, black, red and Neua Thais, and also the Phou-Thais, have generally adopted Brahminic ancestor worship. The Lolos, Méos, Lantène Yaos, etc. are also devotees of this cult, although they have somewhat modified it with certain superstitions.

The Khas of the various tribes profess a kind of ill-defined pantheism as well as the cult of genii, spirits of "Phis," which the other races also observe. Christianity, in both the Catholic and Protestant form, has been adopted by people of diverse origin who have gathered in Christian communities or formed scattered groups in the midst of populations with Asiatic beliefs.

Let us now try to define these various cults and to show how they are understood and by whom they are served.

Religion of the Laotians:

779 "The religion of the Laotians," says the Superior Resident, "is Buddhism. But since there were no Brahmins in Laos whose interest was to see the Brahminic Pantheon supreme, Buddha has kept his preponderant place in the pagodas, whereas in Ceylon and Nepal, the last Buddhist centers in the Indies, he has lost this place and been submerged under and confused with the more ancient gods of Brahminic origin.

[792] "Most of the Laotian bonzes are completely ignorant of the
779 dogmas of the religion which they blindly and deafly serve. One does meet highly learned ones, however, who seem to have a fairly clear idea of doctrine. Eternal nature, which has existed for all time and forms the essence of everything, is to be regarded as a bottomless nothingness and an incommensurable void. Sometimes however, through the fatal effect of desire, this void takes on an appearance. Thence comes all evil, and thence arises suffering. All the appearances which we call life, sickness, death, and separation from what we love, what we desire and [150] what we cannot have, are so many misfortunes. Now, desire is at the origin of all these misfortunes. Suppress desire and at the same time suffering is suppressed. The path to be followed is a simple one: destroy all desire; detach yourself from the things of this world, and try to raise yourself step by step to a higher state throughout all the successive lives which you are obliged to live in varied forms and which will be all the more excellent in the degree that all the acts, words and

779 thoughts of your previous life have been good. Thanks to these efforts you will pass successively, in your various incarnations, from the state of man to the state of holy man, then to that of saint and finally to that of Buddha or perfection, from which you will fall back into the mute and calm abyss, the void and eternal rest. Besides the constant effort of the will to raise itself, the good deeds which you accomplish will tend to the same purpose, whether they be deeds of action, of thought, of word or of intention.

"Anyone who, on the other hand, abandons himself to evil actions and makes no effort to raise himself gradually moves away from the state dreamed by Buddha, and his successive reincarnations occur in the opposite direction, descending into the bodies of animals which may be more or less maleficent and despicable.

"The above, however, are speculations to which the Laotian intelligence cannot rise. The Buddhist religion as practiced in Laos demands only a few outer signs of deference towards bonzes and holy places.

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782 "Besides Buddhism, the Laotians have retained, or transformed into a cult, certain Spirits or Genii whom they call Phis, the innumerable deities of the Brahminic Pantheon by which Buddhism was accompanied when it was imported into Laos and which have been reduced to a lesser stature.

"All the forces of nature, all that is capable of bringing disorder into life and every movement or phenomenon which the Laotian cannot explain is personified by a particular Genie or Spirit.

"The cult of these Phis may be summed up as follows: it is an interested exchange of gifts or sacrifices by men, in return for the goodwill, neutrality or help of the Phis. Oftentimes, when the Phi is not greatly dreaded, a bargain will be made with him which will be repaid after he has performed his part of the bargain. The cult of the Phis has a widespread following, and they have their lay priests who bear the title of guardians of the Genii.

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821 "In addition to the cult of the Phis, which is nothing more nor less than a form of polytheism, the Laotians are subject to rather numerous superstitions.

"Thus if an eclipse of the moon occurs Laotians imagine that a tiger is trying to devour it, and everyone at once begins to take turns banging on gongs, firing shots and using every means to make as much noise as possible so as to frighten off the aforesaid tiger and prevent it from swallowing the nocturnal star.

the "Phi."

It is said that each of us has his good and his evil genie which are engaged in a constant struggle, and that we are good or evil according as the one or the other gains the upper hand. This is a kind of symbolism of good and evil, but here the controlling and guiding conscience is replaced by the influences of the moment, the occasion, the circumstances and the milieu.

Each house also has its own "genie", reminiscent of the Roman Lares, to which sacrifices and offerings are made on every possible occasion.

The evil "Phis" are more dreaded and receive a great many more offerings than the good "Phis," with whom no trouble need be taken.

In each village there is a sorcerer to explain the actions of the "Phis" and teach the way to gain their favor. Although consultations with them are not free of charge these sorcerers, who are called Mo-hou-ha, Mo-Phi or Phi-pop depending on the province, are just as [155] [Illustration] [156] [Blank page] [157] highly regarded as the "Guardians of the Genii" of the Buddhist religion and, like them, are exempt from servitude and taxes.

In times of epidemic all responsibility is attributed to the evil "Phis", and in order to make them take flight the men of the villages beat on the roofs of their houses with long bamboo poles until such time as the "Phis" are supposed to have disappeared.

The Khas have retained a belief in metempsychosis which is tinged with certain rather vague superstitions bearing on a future life and some kind of resurrection. But this second existence is not everyone's privilege, and will exist only insofar as one's life has been a good one.

They also believe in the existence of a place of torment where perjurers, murderers, etc. will remain for all eternity. To be sure, they believe in a general way that a new life will begin and that it will be a reward or a punishment for the individual's deeds in his last incarnation. Thus a brave and good man will return as a happy and respected chieftain. Others will be entitled only to an animal existence, the importance of which in the scale of being will be like a personification of their faults and merits. One odd fact is that women always want to return in the guise of a man;

Religion of the Lus. The religion practiced by the Lus is a form of Buddhism which has been mitigated by certain local customs

771 and to which is added the pantheism of the "Phis." Their general
779 doctrine, however, includes a belief in an "element which creates
all things" and in a future life, the sanction of their dogmatic taboos
and precepts, in a place of eternal beatitude which it is possible to
inhabit here on earth and which is, at bottom, nothing else but the
annihilation of being in the "Nirvana" of the Buddhists.

Among the Lus, even more so than in China and the Indies, the
basis of this mystical and dreamlike religion which is so well suited
to their temperament is an idea of the nothingness of things, the
uselessness of effort and even of action. It is, in a word, the most
complete pessimism and the annihilation of energy and will.

775 Various beliefs. 1. The following is an incantation or prayer
769 for [158] dying persons which gives a good picture of the system of
539 the world and of the idea of metempsychosis:

The sky and the earth are growing dark;

Come out, souls, and gain "space"!

The spirits of the parts of the body are joined together
and form only one!

Listen to the law of Buddha;

We teach the road which leads to the kingdom of Buddha,
the kingdom of the rising sun.

The one soul, the union of the spirits of the body, knows
today that birth and death are alike!

What is birth?

Nothingness produces the generative breath.

The breath produces fire.

Fire produces water.

Water produces earth, mother of all beings.

Birth is produced by harmony and perfect equilibrium of
the elements.

What is death?

Death is a return to the beginning by the reversal of causes.

Earth masters water.

Water masters fire.

Fire masters air.

Air masters nothingness.

Nothingness always remains nothingness.

Nothingness is infinite.

In résumé, Buddhist morality is based on the five following commandments, which are obligatory for all men without distinctions; 779 •

1. Do not take the life of any living being;
2. Do not steal the property of others;
3. Do not commit adultery;
4. Never lie;
5. Do not get drunk on fermented beverages.

It should be noted that these five commandments give rise only to prohibitions, a fact which would seem to indicate that man is mainly inclined toward evil. This is the characteristic feature of Buddhist law; it forbids evil without indicating the means of doing good; it does not uplift the individual morally, but limits itself to preventing him from falling still lower. It acts to preserve a certain moral and social status in which the greater part of humanity is to be kept, under the domination of the bonzes who alone are capable of rising to a knowledge of good and evil.

Despite the purity of its morality and the elevation of its precepts, this religion, which denies progress but from which Christianity has nevertheless borrowed more than one dogma, has not yet been able, after twenty-five centuries of existence, to make civilization penetrate to its faithful.

The Laotian clergy. The Buddhist clergy is composed of three categories of holy men, whom we call bonzes in Laos and talapouts (2) 792 871

(2) From the Siamese word Talaput, a bonze's fan made of palm leaves.

in Siam. These categories are:

1. Boys from ten to fifteen years of age who have entered a bonzery only to learn to read and write the Thai language, and who are called Xieng or Nèn;

2. Student bonzes, called Hatit, who complete their religious education until they reach the age of twenty-two or twenty-five by the study of Youn characters and of Pali, as well as by reading the sacred books;

[161] 3. Last the ordained bonzes or Phra (Phâ, in the current pronunciation) who have pronounced their temporary vows.

There is a well-defined hierarchy among the bonzes which, in terms equivalent to our own, goes from the archbishop to the simple 792

Although less pure than in Cambodia, the bonzes' morals in Laos are generally fairly good. They are, moreover, greatly loved, highly regarded and fondly cherished. When there is a celebration or a great feast in a family, part of the choicest dishes is always reserved for the bonzes.

On the next to the last day of every phase of the moon, the bonzes must make public confession of their faults and be prepared, should the need arise, to undergo the punishments which the code stipulates.

Bonzeries are schools and at the same time workshops where all trades are taught. All knowledge is concentrated in them, as our knowledge was during the Middle Ages in monasteries.

Together with the pagodas, they are also spots of inviolable asylum in accordance with certain rights, and hostelries where travelers are lodged and fed with the produce of the bonzes' alms-seeking.

Newly ordained bonzes must stay in the pagoda at least three months, and may quit their habit at the end of this period. If a bonze desires to return to the pagoda after he has reentered lay life, his reassumption of the habit gives rise to the same formalities and ceremonies as the first time. It is a new ordination.

The liturgical litanies of the Buddhist religion, which the bonzes psalmodize, may not be translated into Laotian. The bonzes and the [165] [Illustration] [166] [Blank page] [167] Laotian faithful, as well as the cantors and the French adepts, chant prayers whose meaning they do not understand (1).

(1) In reality the Laotian, Lu and Youn bonzes form a sort of caste as the Druids used to in Gaul. More particularly, they are the ministers of worship, the repositories of moral authority, of scientific traditions, of secrets and of artistic and industrial methods. They transmit by word of mouth the precepts of Buddhist dogma, which were long ago explained by those who introduced the religion into the land. But the writings in "Pali" which contained these, although they can still be read mechanically by a few scholars, are no longer understood. Thence arises the necessity of handing down their meaning by word alone. Thence also, without doubt, arises the increasingly greater attenuation of the purity and force of these principles as they

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pass from one generation to another and suffer partial suppressions and numberless interpolations.

The bonzes of our own day do not know the sacred language and are reduced to imitating the "hateful" monks of whom Rabalais speaks, "who neither till the soil nor work, but only mumble a great stock of legends and psalms which they do not understand at all."

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The bonzes are the ones who consecrate water and prepare with their prayers for the pronunciation of the oath of allegiance which native officials take twice a year to their direct sovereign and, if necessary, to their suzerain both for themselves and for the whole population. The oath consists in reciting the formula and in drinking lustral water in which the candles used for the ceremony have been extinguished and in which the arms of the sovereign have been dipped.

The following is the formula of the oath which is pronounced in Laos twice a year, in the capital of each province, in the presence of the government commissioner. This formula has been in use in the land for centuries and was left just as it was, except for substituting the title of President of the Republic for that of the king of Siam, Vien-Tiane or Luang-Prabang.

Formula of the oath: "I (there follow the names, titles and qualities of each of the mandarins present, each of whom repeats the formula, which is read aloud by one of them, generally the eldest), take an oath of allegiance and offer my life to the President of the French Republic. I give my word before God and before the angels present in heaven. May God and his angels deign to listen to my vows, because the President of the French Republic governs our land with wisdom and skill, follows the ancient customs and protects the bonzes, the authorities and the inhabitants.

"I place myself under his sacred feet, as well as the soldiers and inhabitants who live in my muong, and we all swear him allegiance.

[168] "I ask to serve the administration in the shadow of his sacred feet and to acknowledge his goodness by promising to be faithful and never to revolt in thought, word or body.

"If I show myself ungrateful to, or if I revolt against the President of the French Republic in thought, word or body; if I see or learn that peril threatens the President of the French Republic and remain silent instead of warning him immediately of the peril which I see or know; if I show myself ungrateful towards the President of the

Tribal Tai

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361 The Neua-Thais. The Neua-Thais differ very little, in all respects, from their fellows. They generally live on higher ground than the other Thais, but they change the location of their village quite frequently. [241] [Illustration] [242] [Blank page] [243]

291 The women knot their skirts under their armpits, above their breasts, and always wear a very short jacket made of cotton, silk or velvet, depending on the season,

231 They engage in sericulture, and with the silk spin and weave brocaded cloth with harmonious colors.

• 779 At the same time as ancestor worship, the Neu-Thais practice an attenuated form of Buddhism. Pagodas are rare and the bonzes, few in number, serve several centers in turn,

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276 Their character is docile. They do not have a very marked taste for trade and are content to be excellent farmers and livestock breeders. Unfortunately, they are inclined to be opium smokers. This is doubtless due to the proximity of the Meos and Yaos who are the producers of the drug.

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101 The Phou-Eunes. This branch of the Thai family is very close to the Laotians in mores and customs.

[438] There are only a few modifications in costume and language, modifications due to the age-old proximity of the Annamites and the continuous relations which have existed between the two peoples. These latter may be explained by the fact that the territory long inhabited by the Phou-Eunes in the east and southeast of Tran-Ninh is situated on the Tonkin Gulf side, and that their produce naturally flows towards the ports on the Annamite coast (1).

(1) To be sure, there are several groupings of Phou-Eunes in the Mekong basin, in Tran-Ninh, to the northeast of Vien-Tiane and in Camkeut-Cammon.

361 The Phou-Eunes prefer to live in high valleys and on high plateaus where the climate is quite severe during the winter. They are more reserved in character than the Laotians, more industrious and less inclined to celebrations and festivities of all kinds.

779 Their religion is Buddhism, but the bonzes are less numerous than elsewhere. It is probable that the little taste which Phou-Eunes have for the religious life is due to the influence of nearby Annam, where the bonzes are a long way from being venerated and coddled as they are in Laos.

734 friend take one's place.

Laotians when they pay a visit to a sick person, prattle noisily, ask the sick person a great number of unnecessary questions, and sometimes tell him stories to cheer him up. This custom must stop. The patient, who is tired, needs rest. The visit one pays him should not last longer than ten minutes.

574 Condolence visit. --The Laotian ceremony connected with
576 the condolence visit is the opposite of the Western ceremony. The
764 The visitor, instead of appearing sad before the family of the deceased, is gay and smiling.

In order to give you an idea of what goes on in a house in which a death has taken place among the Laotians, I shall content myself by citing here certain passages from my article, "The custom of funeral ceremonies in the land of Laos" (1): "Those who believe

764 of funeral ceremonies in the land of Laos" (1): "Those who believe

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1. In Kinnary, No. 4, November, 1946.

in the existence of the phi place a tray of food intended for the deceased near the coffin. Furthermore they place, at the head of the coffin, a sword marked with a cross with chalk, together with a superstitious formula in order to prevent the phi from stealing the coffin away from the deceased. The coffin has to be watched over day and night. The watchers talk, play certain games, or engage in any other diversion. /274/

/825/ "In the course of this watch cats are also prevented from prowling around the coffin. A cat which were to jump across would provoke the resurrection of the dead person, according to what certain people say.

"The house in which the person has died is called heuan di (happy house). There one works, sings, dances, and plays. From it can be heard the sound of orchestras and shouts of joy. Such spectacles have something disconcerting about them to the eyes of strangers. Nevertheless, one should not regard this behavior as a sign of irreverence towards the deceased person. Despite its smiling appearance, the family of the deceased suffers profoundly. It abstains from violent shedding of tears and from public lamentations because it considers a discreet grief more dignified and the sense one has of death in this way a nobler one."

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It would be difficult not to respect this tradition which stems

daughter, Princess Nang Yot Keo. At an indeterminate date which must come between 1340 and 1350, he was given the command of an army destined to reconquer the kingdom of his fathers. According to the Laotian chronicle, the victorious advance of this army enabled Fa Ngoum to declare himself king of Lan Xan. He immediately demanded the submission of all the Thai princes of Mekong. The center of resistance to Fa Ngoum was Phai Nam (spiny bamboos) because of the impenetrable vegetable belt which protected it like veritable ramparts. Fa Ngoum seized it by means of the classical trick of ornamenting missiles with gold and silver, then pretending to retreat and then pouncing on the enemy at the moment when they had scattered to gather the precious metal. In memory of this episode, the town was baptized Vieng Kham which means "circled with gold" and which later became Vientiane, "circled with sandalwood." Fa Ngoum organized his kingdom with force and reigned as a despot. Complaints were made and the king of Cambodia advised him to be moderate. Fa Ngoum then requested that a mission be sent him from Cambodia consisting of religious and lettered men, and of artisans. This mission introduced the orthodox books of Buddhism and a statue of the Buddha (Prabang) which had been presented in the eleventh century to the Khmer sovereign by the king of Ceylon. Prabang thus became the safeguard of the kingdom.

Up until recent years this tradition led one to believe that the introduction of Buddhism into Laos dated from Fa Ngoum. The discovery of a certain number of Buddhist sculptures of Khmer manufacture of the twelfth century A. D., has destroyed this theory (see below: Introduction of Buddhism to Laos).

After a series of wars, Fa Ngoum died in 1373 at the age of fifty-eight. His successor Sam Sen Thai reigned from 1373 to 1416. He kept [16] peace in his kingdom and passed on to his successor a prosperous kingdom, well established and living in peace, and at the same time dreaded by its neighbors.

The fifteenth century saw a succession of sovereigns about whom history has nothing in particular to tell. Let us mention, however, a war with the emperor of Annam. The first part of the sixteenth century passes under the reign of King Phothisarath (1506-1547), a pious Buddhist. One of his most famous actions is the edict against the cult of Phis. Setthathirath came into power in 1548 after a war with the Burmese. His death was followed by a troubled period. The beginning of the seventeenth century is particularly obscure, but in 1637 a great king called Souvigna Vongsa (1637-1694) ascended

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175 the throne. During his reign the kingdom of Lan Xan became again a powerful state. It was at this time that the Dutchman van Wusthoff (1641) visited Vientiane, followed in 1666 by Father Marini (see appendix: Vientiane). This era was one of prosperity for the country.

The eighteenth century brought tragedy to Lan Xan. The country found itself divided into two factions and the two kingdoms of Vientiane and of Luang Prabang did not cease to tear each other apart, thus playing into the hands of Siam and Annam. In the course of the nineteenth century, King Anou (1805-1828) attempted to bring back some of its former pomp to the kingdom of Vientiane. A disastrous war with Siam brought about the systematic destruction of the town of Vientiane and the Siamese domination of the left bank of the Mekong. In 1831 the kingdom of Vientiane even became a Siamese province. Its disappearance led Siam to exert its suzerainty on the principality of Luang Prabang. Since then, [7] Siamese influence became more and more marked in these regions, and two royal commissioners were still assisting the king of Luang Prabang when August Pavie arrived at this town (see appendix).

It is well known that, through the intervention of this friend of Laos, Siam renounced "all claim to the whole territory on the left bank of the Mekong and to the islands in the river." In 1895, His Highness Oun Kham, king of Luang Prabang, received from the representative of France official recognition of the kingdom by the French government. However, in spite of the directives given by Pavie, the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1893 could not be satisfactory either for Laos or for Siam. This error was the result of political policy in regard to England. A partial ratification was necessary, which was accomplished in the treaties of 1904 and 1907.

The accession of His Royal Highness Sisavang Vong in 1904 opened a new era for the kingdom of Lan Xan which ended in the independence of Laos within the framework of the French Union.

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RELIGION

BUDDHISM

779 The Life of Buddha.

Buddhism, the official religion of Laos, is of Indian origin. The story of Sakyamuni, its founder, is without doubt one of the questions most discussed by western science. As Mr. Foucher points out, there is no event in his life, however simple, about which the

question does not arise how one is to know where biographical truth 779
ends and legendary fiction begins. There are two schools: one, with
E. Senart, admits the historical personality of Sakyamuni but insists
it is difficult to separate the legendary pomp which surrounds it; the
other, with Oldenberg and his disciples, feels it is only possible to
reconstruct the life of Buddha from the Singhalese sources (canon
pali). Both seem to be both right and wrong. They are right in what
they admit, and wrong in what they omit. In the Buddha of E. Senart,
it is the man who is wanting; in that of Oldenberg, what is lacking is
the god. While Sakyamuni has himself been careful to tell us that
he is a man, it is equally certain that India has made a god of him.

"In those days, about the time of Zoroaster in Iran and of Con-
fucius in China, a hundred years before Socrates and five centuries
before Jesus Christ, in a lost corner of Nepalese Tarai which is still
marked by an inscribed pillar of the emperor Asoka (third century
B. C.), [19] a child was born in the family of a kind of feudal lord.
His mother died seven days after his birth. He was brought up by
his maternal aunt, the second wife of his father. He grew up,
received the education suitable to his caste, married, had a son,
but at this point became completely disgusted with the world. He
then abandoned everything, his family, his wife, his child, and
left his native town on horseback. In the morning he sent back his
horse and groom and all his princely finery. He exchanged his silk
raiments for the coarse clothing of a hunter, became a mendicant
monk and set out in search of a solution to the eternal problem of
destiny. At first he studied under reputed ascetics, but not satisfied
with the teachings of his masters, he retired into solitude. At last,
after six years of painful research, as he was sitting under a tree of
which a shoot still exists near Gaya in Bihar, he discovered the cure
for all the suffering in the world. At first he went to Benares to preach
the new road to salvation to five of his former schoolmates, but soon
the number of his converts increased, and his doctrine was spread
abroad. For forty-five years the Master himself traveled as a
preaching mendicant throughout the whole middle basin of the Ganges.
At last death overtook him during one of his ceaseless journeys in a
small obscure village in the same region, but further east than that
in which he was born, and there he breathed his last, according to
the Singhalese people in the year 543, or, according to calculations
of European scholars, about 477 before our era." (Foucher)

The Doctrine.

779 The Buddhist faith consists in recognizing the eminent value of the three "joys" (triratna) which are three "refuges"; the Buddha, his dharma or Law, and the Community (sangha). But Buddhism [20] retains the old popular Indian theory of transmigration (samsara) and of karma (the sum of good and bad deeds performed in previous lives). Taking this fact into consideration, the doctrine of Buddha can be summarized as "offering a hope of escape outside of the cycle of rebirths." The universe is but an ocean of suffering. Birth, old age, illness and death, desire and its satisfaction--all is suffering. This suffering arises from the thirst for existence which is born from our attachment to material things. This attachment itself arises from the legacy of our former existences, and this legacy acquires its power from the ignorance which makes us accept as real the accumulated adventitious "I" in the strata of our millennial past. Let us dispel this ignorance and our attachment to life will disappear, the karman in us will be exhausted, and we will escape from the cycle of transmigration. Freed from enforced labors of samsara, the Buddhist finally attains nirvana (Grousset).

The Community.

After obtaining enlightenment, the Buddha fasted for seven weeks. He hesitated to preach his doctrine. Then Brahma and Indra (we must not forget that Buddhism has kept the gods of Brahmanism, but their rôle is now reduced to that of supernumeraries) came to beg him to turn the wheel of the Law. His first audience consisted of his five former schoolmates. Thus the Community was founded. Soon it grew and included some holy men and some laymen. In this form it has remained up to the present day.

Hinayana and Mahayana.

Ancient Buddhism was essentially a brotherhood of isolated monks living in pious retreats apart from human activity and practicing [21] a purely ecclesiastical discipline whose purpose was to form arhat, that is, saints purified from all defilement who have escaped forever from the ocean of transigrations. Their cult was concentrated on the memory of the Sakyamuni Buddha, his relics and his holy places. However, soon after the death of the Buddha there were internal discussions, and sects arose in the bosom of Buddhism. Scholarly controversy between the sects never entailed political rupture, but by the force of things disagreement became more and more marked. The period of the Koushan kings (about the second to third century of our era) saw the differentiation of the two historical

forms of Buddhism: the Mahayana or Great Vehicle, and the Hinayana or Little Vehicle. "One must beware of contrasting too violently the two Vehicles, as is often done. They were held together by many and subtle bonds." However in our days a Laotian Hinayanist and a Mongol Mahayanist have nothing in common.

Roughly, the essential difference between the two doctrines is that Hinayana considers the Buddha not as a superior man but as a man, while Mahayana deified Sakyamuni, who, without being a god, was as much as or more than a deity. Activity, formerly condemned, is glorified, sanctified on condition that it is freed from personal interests and is used for the salvation of others. Individual salvation has absolute value only if it contributes to universal salvation. The nirvana of the Hinayanist must be denounced as a scandalous exaltation of self. Bodhi, the supreme knowledge which makes Buddhas, is accessible to all beings. The saint is the Bodhisattva, who is on the point of reaching nirvana, yet remains during periods of incalculable successive existences to save [22] souls. The Mahayanist universe, which has grown immeasurably is filled with an infinite multitude of Buddhas. Many Bodhisattva exist: the principal ones are Avalokitesvara, Maitreya, Manjousri, Vajrapani, etc. Besides, each Buddha and each Bodhisattva has been doubled by a dhyani-Buddha, a contemplative Buddha (spiritual Buddha). To the belief in nirvana proclaimed by the Hinayana, the Mahayanists add an infinite series of paradises, the "pure Grounds" (this notion is Iranian) where souls saved by the grace of the Bodhisattva are born again in the symbolical lotus.

Mahayana now flourishes in central Asia, in Tibet, China, Japan and in Vietnam, was in vogue in Java, and in the ancient Khmer empire from the ninth to the thirteenth century. Its influence is found in certain sculptures of Luang Prabang (see appendix). Hinayana is practised at the present time in Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Cambodia and Laos.

Introduction of Buddhism to Laos.

According to certain documents, Buddhism was introduced to Laos by Buddhaghosa. This legend is too popular in other Buddhist countries of the Indochinese peninsula for it to be given any credit here. Laotian tradition tells us that Fa Ngoum had a mission come from Cambodia which brought not only the sacred books of orthodox Buddhism but also Brahmanic texts whose traces can still be found today. This tradition, which offers greater proofs than the legend, fixed the date of the introduction of Buddhism to Luang Prabang in

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• 779 the fourteenth century. Archaeological discoveries made in recent years in the region of Luang Prabang and more recent ones in the neighborhood of Vientiane may enable this important event in the religious history of Laos to be moved back more than two centuries.

[23] The Pagoda.

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[792] "Laotians liked to place their pagodas on high points, but their marked taste for the edge of the water made them prefer the neighborhood of rivers. This location of pagodas is a natural consequence of the relations between bonzes and inhabitants. The former drew their livelihood from the latter, and these are crowded on the river banks." In principle the pagoda consists of three elements:

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- 1) The buildings connected directly with the cult: vat, chapels, libraries; that, standing landmarks and niches;
 - 2) The surrounding enclosures, exterior and interior;
 - 3) The buildings for the immediate use of the inhabitants of the pagoda: monastery [bonzerie], cells for the bonzes, reception halls.

The vat consists of a large hall furnished with a pedestal on which stands the statue of the Buddha often accompanied by a preaching pulpit. The columns and walls are frequently ornamented with paintings.

Among the annexes of the vat, the most numerous are the chapels which are in the form either of delicate buildings or small compound halls.

The that is a votive and sometimes a funereal monument. (See appendix on Vientiane).

[788] The only piece of furniture always found in the vat is the preaching pulpit, an elegant construction, often made of gilded wood. By way of furniture there are a few seats for the chiefs of the bonzes, particularly for the torch bearer. Finally, particularly in the region of Luang Prabang, one finds the hang-lin, a curious spout-shaped object, with elegant decoration, which is used for sprinkling the Buddhas on great feast days (cf. the New Year). These various finely carved objects are usually made of gilded wood and are sometimes inlaid with enamelled lead [24] whose brilliant gleam makes them sparkle. The manuscript chests are usually collected in the libraries, piled up in the shape of an inverted pyramid; they are generally carved and gilded.

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He¹ must never look at a woman. However a few old women are seen in the pagoda. These are the devotees. They are dressed in white, their heads are completely shaved, and they lead a life of observance and asceticism which is as rigorous as that of the monks. They render small services to the bonzes, decorate the altar, etc., but they live outside the enclosure of the pagoda.

Laotian Buddhism.

In a recent pamphlet, His Excellency Thao Nhouy Abhay, former Minister of National Culture and Education, wrote: "In its intrinsic substance Buddhism is deeply tolerant, but ours [26] has truly become not austere enough." Therefore he proposes some necessary reforms which would quickly raise the intellectual and moral level of the bonzes in Laos. There are two sects in Laos: the Mahanikay and the Thammayut. The only difference between the two is the way in which they consider that monastic rule should be observed. Nothing distinguishes them in appearance except the color of the monastic robe of the Mahanikay, which is brownish-ochre almost chestnut. The king is the chief of the Buddhist clergy. As for the believer who regularly observes his religious duties, he is satisfied with little and gives much in alms. Buddhist tales and particularly Laotian texts, among them the Pannasajataka (Ha Sip Xat), quote all the merits acquired for future lives by those who give alms and, above all, feed the bonzes.

Religious Literature.

The basis of the religious literature of Laos is the Buddhist Tripitaka. These "Three Baskets" contain the integral "word of the Buddha."

The basket [corbeille] of Vinaya (Vinayapitaka) is the rule of monastic life. It consists of five sections: Patimokkha, Mahavagga, Coullavagga, Souttavibhanga and Parivara. The Patimokkha is meant to be read in public (particularly on the feasts of the eighth month), on the periodic days of confession. The Mahavagga and the Coullavagga give the list of daily obligations, illustrated by examples drawn from the life of the Buddha. The Souttavibhanga is really a commentary on the Patimokkha; finally the Parivara is both a revision and a catechism.

The Basket of the Soutta (Souttapitaka) contains an enormous amount of preaching and of edifying tales. Among others, the famous Dhammapada, a treasury of the sayings of the Buddha and the Jatakas are to be found in this basket.

[27] The third basket is that of Abhidharma and consists of seven

1 [i.e., a bonze -- Analyst]

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538 treatises on metaphysics.

[198] Such is the whole of the Buddhist canon in force in Laos. Un-
[178] fortunately, as the knowledge of Pali disappeared, many texts were forgotten because they were not understood and therefore were not followed. But certainly the most popular text and that which forms the core of all Buddhist literature is the Jatakam.

The Jatakas.

This name is given to a collection of tales about the former lives of the Buddha. As the Master is supposed to have had the greatest variety of experiences from the animal state to that of a god, going through the different states of humanity, his long career as bodhisattva provides ample material for stories of all sorts, moral tales, satirical tales, parables, fables, etc. These stories have no equivalent in any literature, for Buddha knows not only his own births, but also the former births of all creatures, and these he relates as the occasion presents itself. The method of exposition is always the same. The narrator tells more or less briefly the circumstances giving rise to the story of the Buddha, then comes the story itself, finally by way of conclusion, the Buddha relates the past to the present by indicating the identity of the characters in their various roles.

The greatest number of Jatakas take place at the time when "Brahma datta reigned in Benares," which is the equivalent of our "once upon a time."

In these tales the Buddha appears in the most varied roles; he is in turn ascetic, king, scholar, courtier, brahman, prince, noble, merchant, landlord, slave, potter, elephant-driver, woodcutter, mason, thief, actor, student, etc. Sometimes he is a god or the deity of [28] a tree, sometimes merely an animal, such as a serpent, a lizard, a bull, a pig, a dog, etc. The Buddha has none of the prejudices of nobility. Instead he gives a comforting example of how in all ranks of creation one can realize perfection in oneself and serve the collective interests of the universe. The most incongruous materials are harmoniously blended in this incoherent collection which is always frank. The whole Indian folklore is poured into this convenient framework, where it has received the Buddhist stamp, and been spread throughout the whole Far East where it has been received with enthusiasm.

There are 547 Jatakas. Some are more popular than others. Thus, in Laos, there are ten which form a special collection called "Sip Xat" (the ten Jatakas). The best known are the Temiya Jataka: (Cf. Appendix: Luang Prabang).

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538 "The prince heir to the throne Mugapakkha remained dumb until he was thirteen years old. He recovers his speech at the moment when his father wants to bury him alive. He then explains his previous silence by showing that an inconsiderate word may be the cause of great torment in future existences for him who has uttered it." And the Sama Jataka:

"Sama who fed his father and mother, who were both blind, dies of a wound inflicted unintentionally by king Kusi who was deer hunting. As Sama is dying, he entrusts his murderer to break the news to his parents, who lament so painfully that Sakkha is moved and brings Sama back to life."

But of all, the most popular is unquestionably the Pha Vet, the Laotian name for the Vessantara Jataka. (Cf. below Boun Pha Vet).

There exists another series of Jatakas which rival the five hundred Jatakas in popularity. It is the Pannasajataka (Ha Sip Xat) or the fifty Jatakas. This very peculiar text is found in [29] all the literature of western Indochina, and was probably composed in Thai country.

101 Versions exist in Burmese, Khmer, Siamese and Laotian. The Laotian rendition has the peculiarity of containing 27 out of 50 tales which are not found in any other version. These 27 stories are entirely original. They are at the moment in the process of being translated.

Finally the five hundred Laotian Jatakas form a convenient framework into which all kinds of stories in the current language have been inserted. Their study will doubtless prove a mine of information on local folklore.

THE PHI

771 We cannot conclude the chapter relating to the religion of Laos without mentioning the cult of the Phi.

776 In his books "La Participation" and "L'Evolution humaine" the late lamented Jean Przyluski distinguished three successive phases of religion which, according to him, are related to an economic and social state.

When man is a collector of food, that is, when he lives from what he can gather or hunt or fish, his religion is vegetalism or totemism. When he becomes a producer, man's religion becomes agrarian, honoring the gods of vegetation, of the earth, the forests, etc., and particularly the protecting genie of the village. Finally, in the period of urban communities, universal gods appear.

While some reservations might be made on this classification, it does nevertheless offer a convenient framework in which we can